

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL TUESDAY
NOVEMBER 30 HEADED "INCHING FORWARD ON RHODESIA."

2. FOR THE FIRST TIME, RHODESIA'S WHITE MINORITY GOV-
ERNMENT AND THE BLACK NATIONALISTS CHALLENGING IT HAVE
AGREED ON SOMETHING AT THEIR MONTH-OLD MAJORITY-RULE
NGOTIATIONS AT GENEVA. THEY AGREED TO ACCEPT MARCH 1,
1978 (15 MONTHS FROM TOMORROW), AS THE DATE BY WHICH
BRITAIN WILL GRANT THE SUCCESSOR STATE OF ZIMBABWE LEGAL
INDEPENDENCE UNDER MAJORITY RULE. THE SMITH GOVERNMENT,
ARGUING THAT IT WOULD TAKE AT LEAST THAT LONG TO SET UP
AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT, WRITE A CONSTITUTION AND CONDUCT
ELECTIONS, HAD WANTED 23 MONTHS. THE MORE MODERATE
BLACKS WERE WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH THE BRITISH FIGURE
OF 15 MONTHS. THE MILITANTS, INCLUDING ROBERT MUGABE,
WHO CLAIMS TO SPEAK FOR THE GUERRILLAS, AND JOSHUA
NKOMO, WHO HAS HITCHED HIS WAGON TO MR. MUGABE, AT FIRST
DEMANDED 12 MONTHS BUT FINALLY RELENTED AND ACCEPTED 15.

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SO THE CONFERENCE CAN GO ON.

3. AGREEMENT ON A DEADLINE DOES NOT ASSURE AGREEMENT ON

THE AGONIZING SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS OF SHARING AND TRANSFERRING POWER. THE MODERATE NATIONALISTS, WHO ARE THOSE WITH THE CONFIDENCE TO GO THE ELECTORAL ROUTE, AND THE MILITANTS, WHO LACK POPULAR SUPPORT AND THEREFORE RELY ON THE GUN, ARE BOUND TO HAVE A HEAD-ON CONFRONTATION AS THESE QUESTIONS ARE ADDRESSED. AS GRIM AS THIS PROSPECT IS, HOWEVER, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT WHAT HAS JUST BEEN AGREED ON IS NOT MERELY A DATE BUT A PROCESS OF ORDERLY TRANSITION UNDER BRITISH AUSPICES: INTERIM GOVERNMENT, CONSTITUTION, ELECTIONS. NONE OF THE NATIONALISTS DARED WALK OUT ON IT. THE GUERRILLAS ARE STILL IN THE BUSH; INDEED, THE CURRENT RAINY SEASON IS ENABLING THEM TO PENETRATE DEEPER, THOUGH WITH GREATER CASUALTIES, THAN EVER BEFORE. BUT THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE STILL GOING ON AT GENEVA.

4. THE MUGABE-NKOMO FORCES EVIDENTLY CAME UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM THE "FRONTLINE" AFRICAN STATES TO BEND ON THE DEADLINE AND STAY AT THE TABLE. SINCE THOSE STATES (ZAMBIA, TANZANIA AND BOTSWANA IN PARTICULAR) HAVE A CONTINUING INTEREST IN THE EMERGENCE OF A STABLE ZIMBABWE AS THEIR NEIGHBOR, THEY CAN BE COUNTED ON TO CONTINUE URGING MODERATION ON THE NATIONALISTS. BRITAIN, THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH AFRICA, OF COURSE, HAVE A PARALLEL OBLIGATION WITH RESPECT TO IAN SMITH.

5. IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO SEE JUST WHAT KEEPS A NEGOTIATION ON THE RAILS, AND WHAT THROWS IT OFF: THE ASSESSMENT OF RISKS AND PROSPECTS BY THE PARTIES IS NECESSARILY A SUBJECTIVE BUSINESS. ONE CANNOT HELP NOTICING, HOWEVER, THAT THE LEVEL OF NATIONALIST VIOLENCE IS NOT AS HIGH AS IT MIGHT BE IF THE RUSSIANS WERE THROWING EVERYTHING AT THEIR DISPOSAL, INCLUDING THE CUBANS, INTO THE BATTLE. NO DOUBT THERE ARE DIFFERENT EXPLANATIONS FOR THIS RELATIVE DISCRETION. BUT ONE FACTOR IN IT COULD WELL BE THE ASSURANCE OF AMERICAN CONCERN AND CONTINUITY THAT WAS ARRANGED

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QUIETLY BY THE FORD ADMINISTRATION AND JIMMY CARTER AND THAT WAS SURFACED PUBLICLY IN GENEVA EARLIER THIS MONTH BY REP. CHARLES C. DIGGS. IF THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS EVENTUALLY BREAK UP AND RHODESIA LURCHES INTO FULL-SCALE WAR, IT WON'T BE FOR WANT OF AMERICAN TRYING. END TEXT. ROBINSON

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